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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR EPET ECON NATO CH RU UZ KZ
SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: CHINA PRAISES ASTANA'S FOREIGN POLICY, WORRIES
ABOUT RUSSIA

REF: A. 08 ASTANA 0812
B. 09 ASTANA 2168

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4 (A), (B), (D).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: In his farewell courtesy call with the Ambassador on January 22, China's Ambassador to Kazakhstan Cheng Guoping (please protect) highly praised Kazakhstan's skillful balancing of the "great powers." Repeatedly emphasizing the personal nature of the conversation, Cheng highlighted his view that China and Russia must "coexist" in Central Asia. He expressed a positive view of the U.S. role in the region, but cautioned against a permanent military presence. Cheng recommended that the United States urge Uzbekistan to invite NATO "as a guest" to attend the June summit in Tashkent of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in order to increase NATO-SCO cooperation. Cheng departs Astana February 2 to return to Beijing to become Deputy Foreign Minister for Eurasia (the CIS). We suspect Embassy Beijing will find him to be an interesting but reserved interlocutor. END SUMMARY.

FUTURE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER

¶2. (S) Arriving in the Ambassador's office with a large gift bag of green tea "for the Ambassador's health," China's Ambassador to Kazakhstan Cheng Guoping (please protect) stressed his interest in maintaining close contact with the Ambassador after he returns to China February 2 to become Deputy Foreign Minister in charge of Eurasia (i.e., countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States). Among the key issues that he will handle, he mentioned relations with Russia, the SCO, and Kazakhstan. Cheng argued, "Kazakhstan's role and importance is growing daily and is of great significance to China for political, economic, and security reasons." He underlined the need to develop mutual trust in order to enhance Chinese influence in the region, especially because of the area's effect on China's security.

SOPHISTICATED, SMART FOREIGN POLICY

¶3. (S) Cheng strongly agreed with the Kazakhstani Foreign Ministry's portrayal of Kazakhstan as a bridge between East and West, the OSCE

and the SCO. He emphasized the sophistication of Kazakhstan's foreign policy of balancing Russia, the United States, European Union, and China. Highlighting Kazakhstan's membership in the Commonwealth Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Community, and the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union, Cheng stated that Kazakhstan still "attaches great importance to relations with the United States, China, and the European Union."

¶4. (S) Asserting that Kazakhstan is not a pro-Russian country, Cheng called its foreign policy "smart and successful, because good relations with China, the European Union, and the United States increase his (i.e., President Nazarbayev's) influence when he engages with Russia. All countries in the region want to maintain their independence, but Russia wants to regain its regional influence. CIS countries need Russian cooperation and good relations, but they all suspect Russia's intentions. No CIS country wants to return to the Soviet period." Comparing the current situations in Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Cheng again called Kazakhstan "smart" for cooperating with Russia as well as the United States, European Union, and China. Cheng further argued that Kazakhstan's growing economy and influence allow it to resist Russian control.

"CHINA MUST COOPERATE HERE"

¶5. (S) Elaborating on China's role in Central Asia, Cheng said, "The new oil and gas pipelines are breaking Russia's monopoly in energy exports and are decreasing the countries' dependence on Russia. Because Russia wants to maintain a monopoly on oil and gas exports in Central Asia, it dislikes the China-Kazakhstan pipeline (refs A-B)." According to Cheng, as China increases its regional "cooperation," the Russian Foreign Ministry wants to maintain close contact to

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ensure that it does not "harm Russia's core interests." Cheng emphatically declared, "China must cooperate here. The growth of Chinese influence will break the Russian monopoly in the region."

COMPETITION AND COLLABORATION WITH RUSSIA

¶6. (S) Reflecting on his upcoming responsibilities, Cheng stated, "I will have to balance carefully increasing our cooperation with Central Asia with Russian interests. However, we cannot harm our own interests because of Russia. Competition and collaboration coexist in Chinese-Russian relations in Central Asia. Our policy is to coexist here. We must maintain a dialogue and consultations." Cheng asserted that Russia and China can work together on security issues, such as terrorism and narcotics, to the benefit of all. On the economic front, though, Cheng underlined their rivalry, and again asserted that Russia's reaction will not force it to limit its regional cooperation. "In the future, great power relations in Central Asia will be complicated, delicate. Kazakhstan is very smart, aware of the opportunities and that it must maintain a balance," he concluded.

SUPPORT FOR U.S. REGIONAL ROLE

¶7. (S) In contrast to his unease with Russian influence, Cheng argued that the U.S. presence in the region promotes a "balance of the great powers." Cheng emphasized China's support for U.S. efforts to fight the Taliban and terrorists, calling them a common challenge. Nonetheless, he cautioned, "We have concerns if the United States uses the opportunity of fighting terrorists to enhance its military presence in the region." The Ambassador reassured Cheng that the United States does not want a permanent military presence or bases in Central Asia. Given President Obama's focus on Afghanistan and troop increases, he explained, Manas Transit Center -- and potentially other commercial transit centers for goods -- is very important.

"KARIMOV NEEDS POLITICAL SUPPORT"

¶8. (S/NF) Cheng confided that he had "information" about the possibility of a new U.S. military transit center in Uzbekistan and called it a "delicate point." Cheng expressed his belief that Karimov will agree to the proposal because "he needs political support and assistance from other countries due to Uzbekistan's difficulties, poor relations with Russia. He is using the flag of

anti-terrorism efforts to decrease criticism of his regime."

NATO-SCO COOPERATION POSSIBLE

¶19. (S/NF) Replying to Cheng's assertion that "stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan will take a long time," the Ambassador asked if NATO-SCO consultations might be helpful. Cheng highlighted the absence of an established NATO-SCO dialogue before expressing his personal viewpoint. "If NATO wants to establish contact with the SCO, the host of the June 23 SCO Summit [Uzbekistan] can invite NATO to attend as a guest, which would increase understanding and cooperation." He further suggested, as a first step, the United States recommend that NATO attend the meeting because of the event's anti-terrorism "content." He argued, "The United States can attend the June 23 summit being hosted by Tashkent as Uzbekistan's guest in order to increase contact."

¶10. (S/NF) Again emphasizing the personal nature of this not-for-attribution advice, Cheng stated, "Russia supports it as far as I know. China has not researched the issue, but Russia has ideas because of Afghanistan. If the United States advances the suggestion, the Chinese government will actively consider it. The United States must apply to Uzbekistan as the summit's host country. The Chinese government will be cautious, but agreement from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan would be good for the proposal. The United States could attend as a guest of the host country."

NO DIRECT CHINESE INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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¶11. (S) Cheng argued that the United States should attend the summit to "maintain stability and fight the Taliban and terrorists in Central Asia." Cheng underlined the importance China attaches to Afghanistan and the defeat of the Taliban. He also emphasized Chinese fear of the Taliban and Al-Qaida due to their "support of terrorists in Xinjiang." Nonetheless, he asserted that China does not want "direct involvement in the fight because China's capacity to fight terrorists is less than the United States."

CHINESE MEASURES TO SECURE THE PIPELINE

¶12. (S) Emphasizing China's large population, Cheng called preservation of security a big task, for which the Chinese capacity does not match that of the United States. He especially underlined China's vulnerability to attacks on shipping and pipelines, which would strike at the heart of the Chinese economy. According to Cheng, Chinese "measures" to secure the pipeline have included consultations between the "security departments" of China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. He told the Ambassador that China has helped to train security personnel and provide equipment and weapons. He said that China annually supplies materials to Kazakhstan's Ministry of Interior and National Security Committee (KNB).

PERSONAL, NOT OFFICIAL, CONVERSATION

¶13. (S) Concluding this meeting that took place in the Ambassador's office, Cheng again requested that the Ambassador not quote him. He underlined his concern about dissemination of his personal reflections, which he said he conveyed due to his strong personal relationship with the Ambassador.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTES

¶14. (S) Cheng Guoping departs Astana on February 2 for his new assignment as Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister in charge of CIS countries. He said he might travel to the United States on consultations. In addition, he plans to visit the United States upon retirement. His daughter currently studies at the University of Iowa.

¶15. (S) This was the fourth time the Ambassador received Cheng in his office, where Cheng preferred to meet because, he has told the Ambassador, he does not feel comfortable speaking freely in his own office. Even so, Chen exhibits maximum caution, whispering his

comments in Mandarin (he does not speak English or Russian) to his interpreter. We suspect that Embassy Beijing will find him to be an interesting but reserved interlocutor.

¶16. (S) COMMENT: Fear about China regularly appears in conversations and the press in Kazakhstan. Some Kazakhstanis worry about Chinese control of natural resources and proposals to lease agricultural land. Because Kazakhstanis are attuned to their geography as a resource-rich country with vast swaths of uninhabited land bordering the world's most populous nation, they convey anxiety that the Chinese will arrive "like ants to colonize." Cheng's portrayal of Chinese concerns about Kazakhstan's other large neighbor gives another perspective to the power game, which Kazakhstan so adeptly plays. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND